

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),  
BUILDING NO. II  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-K

HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA,  
695K-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA,  
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**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
**JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 11**  
**HABS No. PA-5383-K**

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.  
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial, industrial tenants, and artist's studio.

Significance:

Building 11 is significant as it reflects the tremendous growth and expansion of the Dobsons' mill in the late nineteenth century. Its major addition in the early twentieth century serves as a document to the change in masonry construction techniques at this time and to the practice of expanding earlier mill buildings to meet modern standards and requirements.

## **PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **A. Physical History**

#### **Date(s) of Erection:**

1883/1884, 1887, 1910 with later additions. Building 11 first appears on the 1885 Hexamer Survey with a construction date of 1883/1884.

#### **Architect:**

Unknown.

#### **Original/Subsequent Owners:**

See Chain of Title.

#### **Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:**

Brick fire towers constructed circa 1910, McMurtrie Co. (Building Permit).

#### **Original Plans and Construction:**

Building 11 was originally constructed as a two-story and attic, rectangular, rubblestone building with a tin roof. The fenestration was composed of segmental brick arched openings filled with double hung multiple light sash. The appearance of the original doors is not known. The building's first through third floor heights were 12', 10', and 10' respectively. The masonry bearing walls varied in width from 24" to 18". A stairway was located at the building's eastern end. Open frame bridges, clad in metal, 32' in length, extended between the upper floors of this building and the building to its south (Building 9). The original building was used on the first floor for finishing plush (batting room), the second floor for power loom weaving and the third floor for warp dressing.

#### **Alterations and Additions:**

In 1887, the building was extended to the west (to Crawford Street) with a three-story stone addition. In 1910 three stories were added to the original building and the 1887 addition, making it a five-story building. The original 1880s clerestory roof was also removed at this time. The sash fenestration in the upper stories of the building was regular with flat brick soldier course lintels. Two brick fire towers were added to the northern facade of the building circa 1910. The existing steel industrial sash throughout the building matches the circa 1910 sash of the fire towers and was most likely installed at the time of the construction of the towers. The three-story addition housed plush batting, winding and

plush weaving facilities. The building has been altered throughout the second half of the twentieth century by the modernization and addition of mechanical systems, minor changes to the fenestration for loading docks, and the addition of two large billboards on the roof.

### **B. Historical Context**

The tremendous growth and expansion of the Dobsons' mill facilities in the late nineteenth century is marked by the erection and rapid enlargement of Building 11. Building 11, the longest surviving building on the site, documents the change in masonry construction techniques from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century when ventilation and lighting requirements lead to larger windows in the mills and changes in glass manufacturing allowed it.

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement**

#### **Architectural Character:**

Building 11's local rubblestone construction, regular window fenestration, utilitarian finishes and tremendous size are characteristics of the late-nineteenth-century mill buildings on the Dobson site. The building also displays early-twentieth-century changes in masonry construction techniques and the preference for adapting and expanding earlier buildings to meet increased space requirements and evolving technology.

#### **Condition of Fabric:**

The masonry and timber framing of the building are in generally sound condition.

### **B. Description of Exterior**

#### **Overall Dimensions:**

E elev.-45.2'; S elev.-242.6'; w elev.-54.6'; N elev.-212'. 1910 firetowers 20' x 10'.

#### **Foundations:**

Randomly laid rubblestone with barn dash mortar.

Walls:

Randomly laid rubblestone with brick trim; eroded mortar joints on the lower stories, barn dash on the upper; steel bolts and tie brackets which are visible on the south and north elevations reinforce the building. Walls terminate with a simple built-up wood cornice with modern flashing. 5-story brick fire towers are at either end of the north elevation.

Structural System, Framing:

Load bearing masonry walls with post and lintel interior frame construction.

Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkhead:

Brick fire towers on the north facade open onto concrete platforms with pipe railings at every story. Metal clad, open frame bridge with pipe railing on the fifth floor, south elevation, leads to Building 9. On the south elevation, there is a concrete loading dock with a pipe rail.

Chimneys:

None; modern stove pipe venting a chemical laboratory and testing facility on the first and second floors, extends full height of building on east elevation.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

Modern utilitarian double and single-leaf doors, fire towers fitted with steel fire doors, on the second and third floors five-panel wood doors with multi-light transoms.

Windows/Shutters:

All original wood sash now replaced with steel sash on the south, north and east, lower two stories - segmental brick arches head the windows; upper three stories - larger windows with steel lintels headed by brick soldier courses. West elevations-segmental brick arches over the windows on the lower three stories; larger windows with steel lintels headed by brick soldier courses on upper stories. East and South elevations-some windows have been infilled and altered to create modern garage and loading door openings.

Roof:

Low pitched gable, constructed of a series of roof rafters and wood columns. Roof modern built-up 4-ply. Added in the mid-twentieth century, two modern, steel framed, roof mounted billboards.

### **C. Description of Interior**

#### **Floor Plans:**

Basement- none, building is built on grade. Ground Floor- Utilitarian industrial space; recent infill cinderblock construction between center wooden column line has divided space. Upper Floors- Utilitarian industrial spaces; partially divided by modern plywood partitions.

#### **Stairways:**

Fire towers on northern elevation contain wood dog-leg stairs with matchboard partitions, exposed brick and stone walls.

#### **Flooring:**

Ground floor - concrete slab, upper floors - unfinished wooden floors.

#### **Wall/Ceiling Finishes:**

Plastered rubble walls, exposed timber and plank ceilings.

#### **Openings:**

##### **Doorways/Doors:**

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

##### **Windows:**

All windows are recessed in unornamented plaster.

#### **Decorative Features and Trim:**

N/A.

#### **Hardware:**

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts, and stove pipe along east elevation.

Lighting: Modern ceiling mounted lighting.

Plumbing: Early-20th-century, ceiling mounted, sprinkler fire suppression system.

**D. Site**

General Setting and Orientation:

Building 11's primary facade is oriented to the southeast. The building is set above many of the other mill buildings on the western edge of the west parcel of the complex. A steep paved drive accesses the building from the south creating a primary loading area along the eastern elevation of the building. Approximately 35' from the southern elevation of the building, there is a dramatic drop in grade indicating Building 9's original location.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.